

## CHANGING MY ATTITUDE

*Anonymous, 8th Grade*

Respect means that I can talk to someone about anything and they won't laugh or make fun of me. I have respect for my classroom assistant. She has taught me to add, subtract, shown me the families of facts and also taught me to round numbers and use the first digits. If it weren't for her, I wouldn't know anything. Now she and I are working on my attitude.

I have a bad attitude. My family says that when I was born, I was dropped on my head. My family laughs at me and asks me, "If I am going to grow up." But my assistant respects me and told me I should respect my family. I can tell her anything and she can tell me things. I love her with all my heart. She does things for me and I appreciate what she does for me. She's my heart.

Sometimes I sit back and think of what has happened to me and sometimes I cry. I am going to stay in school. I am going to finish school and then I am going to college. I am going to go to nursing school and try to get a job at Robert Wood Johnson Hospital.

Because I am in special education, I used to be ashamed to go to the school assembly. I thought that they would laugh at me. Sometimes I cried and they would look at me and think that I was crazy. Now that I am growing up, I am not ashamed to go to the assembly. I remember what my assistant always says: "Don't worry about them. They don't know you and they don't live with you. You know the truth about yourself."

I have been working hard to get out of special education. I have been working hard on my math by getting A's and B's. Also, I am getting A+'s on my spelling tests. This is helping me with my attitude and it helps me to respect myself. I may not be perfect yet, but my assistant is working with me. I am learning to respect myself and other people. Before I started changing my attitude I wanted to fight people. Now I respect people and, instead of fighting, I walk away.

Even though I am in special education, I am learning a lot more than in the other classes. So I don't care if they make fun of me. Now I respect myself. I have learned a lot about respect from my assistant. I know to leave everybody alone. I know I will get along better with my family and friends because I learned respect.

## RESPECT COMES FROM THE HEART

*Anonymous, 8th Grade*

Respect is something that my dad has always taught me to have. He says that I should respect who and what I am. He says that I should have respect for him and my mom because they have always loved and supported me. He taught me to have respect for my elders who share their knowledge and wisdom with me. Respect is my law of life.

Respect comes from the heart. Every person's heart is like a tree. When a baby is born, his heart is a seed in soil. At this point, all it needs is a main character trait (kindness, generosity, etc.) for its roots and trunk. Some of the *Laws of Life* that the baby needs to believe in will become the branches. In order for the tree to grow, it will need the care of parents, water, and sunlight. If you use pure water and bright sunlight to grow that seed, it will have the roots of respect and a caring attitude toward the world, and it will help this planet to become a better place. If the seed is raised in bitter water and dim sunlight, then it will grow dark and rotten, and it won't do anything but take up space.

Respect is not just treating someone right in order to get something in return. It asks that we treat people the way we want to be treated, fairly and equally. No one wants to be treated like dirt. We all want to be treated with dignity. Respect is showing someone kindness and not trying to hurt them in any way. That is what respect is.

But to gain respect, you have to give it first. In order to give respect, you must respect yourself. People who don't respect themselves often go bad, and they don't care about what becomes of anyone or anything, not even themselves. People like that often find themselves in gangs or they end up as thieves or drug dealers. They don't care what happens to anyone or anything, and they definitely have no respect for others. People who care about themselves and have self-respect find it easy to respect others. They can care about the baby they're looking after or the dog they are walking without worrying about their paycheck. These people have a future.

We live in a really messed up world. So many people lack respect for others. If people had more respect for everything and everyone in the world, there would be no war. There would be no killings, no thieves, no gangs, no need for police and the Twin Towers would still be standing. It's actually kind of sad. The world has gone through many slave trades, wars, revolts, battles, racism, and much more. Many have lost their lives for liberty and the good life.

Respect is my law of life, and it is a very important one for the world. The level of respect that each of us shows can help determine the quality of our life in the world. Since there are so many dark trees with no branches of respect, the world is messed up and full of hate and selfishness. But this is not everywhere, and luckily, there is not enough of it to spread across the entire world. If everyone had respect for their past, their peers, and their lives, the world would be a better place.

## SHOW RESPECT – IT WILL FEEL GOOD

*Anonymous, 5th Grade*

My parents teach me many things. They always say, "Treat others the way you want to be treated. You are a model of us, so you must be respectful." Respect is one thing I want to remember and to show in my everyday life.

A respectful person believes it's always important to listen to and have an open mind when dealing with others. As children, we are taught to respect our parents, teachers, and elders, and to obey school rules, traffic laws, family cultural traditions, be aware of other people's feelings, rights, honor our country's flag, leaders, the truth, and people with different opinions. To me, respect is like a boomerang; you must give it out before it will come back.

One way you can show respect for others is by not leaving the room when someone is speaking. I wish this respect was shown more often in church. Every Sunday when I am in church you can expect two or three people to get up out of their seats and leave the room while the pastor is preaching. It makes me angry everytime this happens because they are not showing respect. To show respect in the church, everyone should remain quietly in their seat until he is finished.

Another way you can show respect for others is by taking a person's feelings into consideration. I remember one day when I was sitting in a fast food restaurant in New York and a homeless man walked in. Right away the waitress started screaming loudly and told the man he had to leave. She did not care whether he had money or not. Everyone in the restaurant looked up to see what was happening. I believe the man felt embarrassed and ashamed. Suddenly, he said to the waitress, "You got to show folks some respect, sister. That ain't no way to be speaking to nobody." While the waitress and the man argued, I felt sad for both of them. I could understand how they both felt. I said to my mom, "Everyone, even the homeless street person, needs to feel respected."

Another way you can show respect for others is to avoid interrupting when someone is speaking. If you want to speak to someone and they are already talking to another person, you should say "Excuse me." After that, you need to wait to be acknowledged before you begin talking. You should not just walk up to another person and begin your own conversation when others are talking.

My parents have taught that every human being needs to feel respected, even the homeless. We must take a person's feelings, needs, and thoughts into consideration. When people respect one another there are fewer arguments. Therefore, treat others the way you want to be treated and you will have no problem earning respect. You will simply feel better about yourself when you show respect. Therefore, respect is the law of life I want to follow and I hope you do too.

## LIFE'S JOURNEY

*Anonymous, 11th Grade*

Growing up in Plainfield, I'd have to admit that many of the citizens and those who have grown up along side me have fallen victim to the various stereotypes put upon people of our specific social status. So many simply succumb to the pressures and hardships of this unpredictable life. However seeing these circumventable mistakes made by those who were the most influential in my earlier years, I realized that I don't want to end up like the thousands who forcibly forfeited their opportunity to further their education at an institution of higher learning, so as to be able to fend for both their families and themselves. Ambition, wisdom, and perseverance are the key weapons equipping me for this life long journey. Although these are not the only laws that I abide by, they are the most essential to me as concerns my future.

Determination, willingness to work hard, putting my future into perspective (becoming a lawyer and psychologist), and going full force into life are necessary if I want to attain both happiness and success. Ambition, my first law of life is what is needed the most. It is like the gasoline in an automobile, it fuels it all and allows others to function, too. My ambition is my constant push/desire to do or be more. Because of it, I can take each experience for what it is worth, drive straight past all opposition and head directly down the road to my prize.

Gained through multiple trial and error experiences, wisdom is my next law of life. Taking into account lessons learned either by myself or through the advice of those who may have already gone along this path, my journey will be made much easier because I will have knowledge of what may come. Knowledgeable peers or adults may offer advice based on their life experiences but, the best lessons are those I will learn through making my own mistakes. Since I am an assertive and courageous person who is not willing to always to seek guidance before acting, like a baby discovering fire for the first time, I will get no doubt burned and gain from an unforgettable lesson. It is through events like this that I expect to gain wisdom along the way.

Ambition initiates things, wisdom comes later. I know that success is not something that can be achieved over night. Patience is truly a virtue. It may take a while for me to reach my final stage of success. Trouble can only last for so long. Maintaining a level head and keeping everything in perspective and manageable, will make it possible to endure this storm. In fact, it will be a mere bump in the road. So, my final law of life is perseverance.

Watching so many members of my family settle for pennies when they could be worth millions is saddening. They have yet to achieve any level of true happiness, yet they remain content with their living conditions. However, the combination of these laws of life gives me a secret weapon and enables me confront every obstacle with ease.

## NEVER GIVE UP

*Anonymous, 8th Grade*

Out of all the different laws of life, "Never give up," means the most to me. I love my mother very much because she taught me this. If you give up, you will never succeed at anything. Everyday of my life, I struggle to "never give up" because I plan to be a doctor.

My mother was a good student in elementary school, junior high school, and up to high school. When she was in high school her parents divorced. She had seven younger brothers and sisters she had to help care for. Her mother was very sick, and in and out of the hospital. Her father left home, but she "never gave up."

My mother was planning to graduate from high school and go to college just like her parents, and older sister and brother. She had a guidance counselor who refused to put her in the honors math classes for two years. She knew something was wrong, but with no one to help her, she became discouraged, she graduated from high school, but she gave up wanting to attend college.

Twenty years later when she was older, my mother thought about college again. A trip to Africa helped her see that she was wasting time. A friend told her that if she still wanted to go to college, it was not too late. She was very afraid, but she went to college anyway.

My mom excelled and kept a 4.0 grade average. She was elected president of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society. She traveled all over America with Phi Theta Kappa. After three years, she graduated valedictorian of her class, and got a scholarship to Columbia University. She is so happy she "never gave up."

Before graduating, she was in a very bad car accident that burst her heart. For a year she walked around feeling weak, not knowing what was wrong. She was admitted to the hospital multiple times, but no one helped her. She "never gave up" and kept going to work and school. She went to the doctor at Columbia, and he told her she needed heart surgery immediately or she could die.

My mom had to stop going to Columbia to have surgery. She felt very bad and she felt like another obstacle was being put in her way, but she "did not give up." Even when she was sick and injured, she "never gives up." Every day she tells me to keep working hard to achieve my dream of becoming a doctor. She also says that, if she had kept going after high school, she would be doing much better.

My mother almost gave up her dream years ago and she waited a long time to try again. Now she says she will "never give up." To this day, she continues to be a role model in my life, because she continues to show me why I should "never give up."